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ABSTRACT

To gather data on the goals and effectiveness of a postsecondary program organized from the perspective of multiculturalism, a case study was conducted of Nuevos Horizontes (NH), an immigrant education program at Triton College, in Illinois. NH is designed to facilitate access to higher education for Hispanics and other minority students; provide educational programs for immigrant adults; and inform the community of educational and cultural opportunities available at Triton. In a 3-day site visit, interviews were conducted with 14 students and 27 faculty and staff participating in NH and program reports and materials were collected and analyzed. Results of the case study included the following: (1) in 1993, over 8,000 students utilized NH's services; (2) outstanding program elements included a festival celebrating Hispanic culture, an HIV/AIDS education and prevention program, and a swearing-in ceremony for citizens prepared through NH; and (3) keys to NH's effectiveness were the emphasis placed on celebrating Hispanic culture while increasing participants' knowledge of English and U.S. culture, the bilingual staff, the commitment to holistic education, the physical proximity to the Hispanic community, and the effective use of community partnerships. Although the program was successful in creating an educational environment that makes Hispanic immigrants feel comfortable, the college runs the risk of compartmentalizing multiculturalism and limiting the impact cultural diversity might have on the main campus and the entire community. (KP)

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SYMPOSIUM

ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORKS AND STRATEGIES FOR MULTICULTURAL CAMPUSES

PAPER

MULTICULTURALISM AND THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE:
A Case Study of an Immigrant Education Program

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Introduction

What does it mean to restructure postsecondary institutions from the perspective of multiculturalism? This is one of the central questions I examine in this case study of an immigrant education program situated at Triton (Community) College. The program, known as Nuevos Horizontes (New Horizons), is an extension of Triton College and is located in a nearby suburb. I analyze the goals and effectiveness of Nuevos Horizontes as a means to more clearly situate a vision of multiculturalism. Thus, I have two goals in this paper: to analyze Nuevos Horizontes as a multicultural innovation and to use this analysis to rethink multicultural organizational change.

This case study is part of a larger project to examine mulitcultural innovation in academe and is sponsored by the National Center for Teaching, Learning and Assessment at Pennsylvania State University. The program was selected because of the importance of providing educational services for a growing immigrant population in the United States. Thus, my initial goal was to learn more about the program and to evaluate it as a multicultural innovation.

Multiculturalism is a central topic in today's debates about United States educational policy. To some, multiculturalism poses a threat to the best of what U.S education has to offer--the values, beliefs, and traditions of Western civilization. For example, Ravitch (1990) assails "particularistic multiculturalism" for its criticism of a Eurocentric educational system and its attempt to "raise the self-esteem and academic achievement of children from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds" (p. 340). Ravitch argues that education in general and the curriculum in particular play a "relatively small role" in enhancing a student's self-

esteem (p. 341). Instead, educators ought to instill common values amongst all students regardless of their cultural heritage.

To others, multiculturalism is a means to achieve greater equality. By offering courses and educational experiences that expose students to a wide range of cultures and world views, both the majority and the minority will gain from increased understanding of the other. The assumption is that with increased awareness will come greater toleration for difference. Bensimon (1994) discusses this view of multiculturalism as the human relations perspective: "The human relations vision downplays 'differences,' because it is primarily concerned with the reduction of tension and conflict among different groups. Accordingly, curricular change that is framed in human relations terms will focus on the development of more accepting attitudes" (p. 13).

Still others see multiculturalism as much more than learning about diverse cultures and cultural groups. Multiculturalism has the potential to transform educational institutions from monolithic centers of power to democratic constellations in which organizational structures reflect diverse cultures and voices. From this perspective, multiculturalism reaches into the depths of what educational institutions <u>are</u> with the hopes of creating what <u>ought</u> to be. As Bensimon (1994) maintains, "We must recognize that the perspective of multiculturalism, the struggle to create a more democratic, pluralistic education system in this country, is part of the struggle to empower people. . . . Such an education seeks not to inform but to transform" (p. 7). This latter view of multicultural education frames the analysis throughout this case study.

Multicultural organizational transformation does not occur overnight. Despite the urgency to create more equitable educational settings, the reality is that gains often occur in small advances. In this paper I examine one of those advances--an adult education program designed primarily to serve Hispanic immigrants.

Method

The data for this article derive from a three-day site visit in which over 40 faculty, staff, and students were formally interviewed (14 students and 27 faculty/staff). Interview participants were selected because of their role in the development or supervision of the program, or because of their participation as a student or teacher. Interviews lasted approximately one hour and were recorded using hand notes. Different interview protocols were developed for the various groups participating in interviews: one for senior-level administrators and board members, one for staff, and one for students. Here, and throughout this article, I define students as those individuals who participate in educational programs implemented by Nuevos Horizontes regardless of whether they are formally enrolled at Triton College.

In addition to interviews, a number of documents were collected and examined as part of the data analysis. For example, a recent report profiling the demographics of Nuevos Horizontes students and the surrounding community was informative. Various program materials and announcements provided information about the kinds of educational activities offered. College reports, such as the Triton College Strategic Plan 1993-1995,

provided insights about the college and the importance of outreach programs like Nuevos Horizontes.

The following research questions have guided the case study: In what ways is Nuevos Horizontes innovative? And, how effective is the program in creating a multicultural educational environment for students? In the remaining sections I focus my attention on these two research questions and relate them to the larger issue of how we think about multicultural organizational change. The concern for the innovative quality of Nuevos Horizontes and its effectiveness relate to my first goal: to analyze Nuevos Horizontes as a multicultural program. The concern about the larger issue of how we think about multicultural organizational change relates to my second goal. However, before I proceed to a discussion of Nuevos Horizontes, some background information about Triton College is helpful.

Organizational Background

Triton College is located in River Grove, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago. Founded in 1964, the college serves 23 communities with a combined population of nearly 320,000. Seventy-three percent of Triton's constituents are White, 16 percent are Black, and 8 percent are Hispanic. Although Whites comprise the largest group within Triton's district, their numbers have decreased by 14 percent since 1980 at the same time that the Hispanic population increased by 80 percent. Much of the increase can be attributed to immigration.

During a typical semester, Triton serves some 20,000 students. Underrepresented students comprise approximately 31 percent of the student body. Eleven percent of the

students at Triton are Hispanic, a figure that represents nearly a three-fold increase since 1984. Part of the reason for the increase in Triton's Hispanic student population is due to immigration; another factor is age: over 50 percent of all Hispanics in the area are under the age of 25. The breakdown of the Hispanic population is as follows: 69 percent Mexican American, 7 percent Puerto Rican, 7 percent South American, 5 percent Cuban, 4 percent Central American, and 7 percent Other.

The growing size of the Hispanic population is reason enough to provide special services for Hispanic residents. Another reason relates to educational achievement. Forty percent of Hispanics within the district who are 25 years of age or older have not achieved a high school diploma. This compares to 25 percent for non-Hispanics. These figures support national findings that also reveal high attrition rates for Hispanic college students (Rendon & Nora, 1988; Nora & Rendon, 1988), and low transfer rates for Hispanic community college students (Rendon, 1993). Unemployment rates for district Hispanics, male and female, are also higher than for non-Hispanics: The unemployment rate for male Hispanics is 6.7 percent compared to 5.2 percent for non-Hispanics, and the rate is 8.4 percent for female Hispanics and 4.4 percent for non-Hispanic females (Solorzano, 1993).

The demographic, educational achievement, and employment data all highlight the need for Triton College to direct resources to Hispanic residents. Nuevos Horizontes is the central organizational structure in Triton's efforts to serve Hispanic residents, and Nuevos symbolizes the college's commitment to reaching out to its constituent communities.

Nuevos Horizontes

Nuevos Horizontes, also formally referred to as Triton College Community Center, was founded in 1981 as an outreach center to provide educational opportunities to Triton's diverse communities. The goal of the center is threefold: 1) to promote and facilitate access to higher education among Hispanic and other students; 2) to provide educational programs and services to enable immigrant adults to become productive and responsible parents, employees, and citizens; and 3) to inform the community of educational and cultural opportunities available at Triton.

Although Nuevos Horizontes serves all the communities within Triton's district, the reality is that most of its students come from the local community of Melrose Park. Melrose Park has the highest percentage of Hispanic residents of all the communities in the district: 23 percent of all Hispanics in the district live in Melrose Park and 30 percent of its residents are Hispanic. The overall per capita income of Melrose Park (for all residents) is $13,249 compared to $8,931 for Hispanic residents. Nearly 8 percent of all residents in the community exist below the poverty level, the great majority of whom are Hispanic (93 percent) (Solorzano, 1993).

In terms of services, the center offers a variety of programs, classes, and workshops: Triton admission information; academic counseling; citizenship classes; community agency information; cultural events; English as a Second language (ESL) classes; general education classes; free legal advice about immigration and naturalization policies; registration for ESL and GED classes; tax preparation assistance and classes; tutoring in Spanish literacy, English, and Math; and a variety of workshops designed to meet the specific needs of

Hispanic students, parents, and immigrants. One of the ten workshops offered by the Parents Education Program at Nuevos Horizontes deals with some of the communication problems immigrant parents have with their children, who often are immersed in English-speaking schools and U.S. student subcultures. A staff member commented on advice she offers to immigrant parents: "Your children are now learning English and American culture. You also need to learn it or you cannot communicate to your children. At the same time it's your job to teach your heritage. No one else is going to do it. You have to."

A question that ought to be asked of all community college immigrant education programs relates to issues of cultural identity: How do people learn a new language or a new culture without losing their own sense of cultural identity? The following response from a staff member at Nuevos Horizontes is helpful: "We want people who come here to see that the Center is part of the culture. We can keep our own culture. We can add another culture. We can add other languages. We cannot forget who we are. If we don't have our own identity, how are we going to grow? This individual went on to add, "We never say, 'This is it. You are in the United States. Forget about your culture.' You can be bilingual." The comments by the preceding individual highlight a fundamental component of multicultural education: the celebration of cultural difference and diverse identities.

Probably no single program signifies the commitment of Nuevos Horizontes to Hispanic culture and heritage more than HispanoFest, which is a two-week celebration coinciding with Hispanic Heritage Month. The culmination of the two-week celebration is

a two-day festival held in Melrose Park. HispanoFest originated in 1990 and attracts local residents as well as people from throughout the district. A Nuevos Horizontes staff member talked about the rationale for HispanoFest:

> We had an art and writing contest with the elementary school children. We got the local businesses involved. We could not believe the response. It was overwhelming. We had to form subcommittees to evaluate all the submissions. We gave prizes to each grade level--dictionaries and Triton College sweatshirts donated by the president. More important though was what we learned. We noticed there was a lot of low self-esteem. Not only in the art work but in the writing too.

Staff at the center and at Triton felt something needed to be done to bring people in the Hispanic community together, to let people share their culture with others so that the children learn that their culture is important. As one Nuevos Horizontes staff person mentioned: "We ask people from around the area to come and share <u>our</u> culture. To Hispanics who live here, we ask them to come and share '<u>your</u> culture' with others."

HispanoFest involves a great deal of collaboration with local business people. One local business owner commented on why he gets involved in HispanoFest, both in terms of his time and financial contributions: "It's more than the benefit we get as a business. It's an opportunity to give something back to my customers. Helping Nuevos and HispanoFest is a way to say thank you." All proceeds generated by HispanoFest go toward a student scholarship fund for deserving students from Hispanic origin. This past year, four full-year scholarships for attendance at Triton College were awarded.

HispanoFest as an activity symbolizes the commitment of Nuevos Horizontes to Hispanic culture and heritage. The physical setting of the Center sends a similar message. The program is housed in a two-story building. On the first floor is a reception area, a

reading room, and two offices. The second floor houses two classrooms in which many of the ESL courses as well as other programs are held. The walls throughout the building are decorated with posters, paintings, and plaques, nearly all of which celebrate Hispanic culture and education. A center staff member commented on the decor: "We want people who come here to see what other Hispanics have accomplished. That we have culture too."

Analysis of Nuevos Horizontes

Evaluating the success of a college program or unit typically is not an easy task. Unlike the business world where the bottom line--financial profit--is a fairly quick and easy gauge of success, educational programs do not always have clear bottom lines. In terms of Nuevos, what indicators exist that provide evidence of its effectiveness?

A member of the board of trustees at Triton commented on how she evaluates Nuevos Horizontes: "I evaluate the program by looking at the people involved in it--by looking at the scores of people who line up in front of the building to register for classes. I also look at the quality of programs and the innovative ideas. I look at the exposure: Does the community buy into it? Everybody knows about Nuevos Horizontes."

As the preceding board member highlights, one indicator of success is the number of students served by the program. Triton College uses utilization data as its primary outcome indicator. In 1993, for example, over 8000 students utilized the services of Nuevos Horizontes. This is a remarkable figure considering the size of full-time staff (2), and the smallish facility (two-floors, four-rooms). Of the more than 8000 students served, over 2600 enrolled in Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs or ESL classes.

Another indicator of success relates to the quality of and participation in various individual workshops or programs. Clearly, HispanoFest has been a hugh success. But, other programs also stand out. For example, the HIV/AIDS Education/Prevention Program offered by Nuevos Horizontes received the National 1992 Secretary's Community Health Promotion Award from the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Development Services. Another program that received much publicity was a naturalization ceremony. In July of 1993, Triton College hosted its first-ever "Citizenship Swearing-In Ceremony," presided over and organized by Nuevos Horizontes staff. Moreover, the citizens were all prepared through programs implemented by the center. The program was organized in conjunction with the Immigration Naturalization Service (INS). Sworn in as citizens were 66 people originating from Mexico, 14 from Cuba, 6 from Guatemala, 2 from El Salvador, 2 from Italy, and 1 person each from Poland, Iraq, and Honduras. Immediately following the ceremony was a reception to honor the new citizens, many of whom by-passed the snack table in order to register to vote at another table--an idea also organized by Nuevos Horizontes staff. The INS District Director commented on why approval was given to hold the ceremony at the college: "The preparation for citizenship should not be a government process. All the community has an interest in this."

An additional indicator of the success of Nuevos Horizontes has been its ability to generate community support. Recently, the center cosponsored the first community education conference entitled "Celebrating Partnerships." The conference provided opportunities for local citizens, agencies, and businesses to become actively involved in the

area's education and community concerns. The conference was so successful that plans have been made for the conference to become a yearly event.

The success stories of students are also indicators of the effectiveness of Nuevos Horizontes. Carlita Gonzalez (pseudonym) recently received an award from President Clinton for her service to the local community. She was instrumental in organizing a group of youth to build a playground for local children. Carlita, who came to the U.S from Mexico with her family when she was five, commented on Nuevos Horizontes: "It's very useful, very beneficial. Many people come here to take citizenship classes. Nuevos plans great activities. I like coming here. I come here when I have problems. I get a lot of help and support." Carlita is a full-time student at Triton and eventually plans to transfer to a four-year school.

Romano Suarez (pseudonym) came to the U.S. from Mexico about six years ago. He had studied chemistry at a university in Mexico City but language problems prevented him from pursuing his studies in the states. "When I came here I wanted to go to school but I couldn't speak English. When I found out about Nuevos Horizontes I found out I could do a lot of things." Romano took ESL courses at the center and eventually enrolled in classes at Triton. He also found other center programs helpful: "I went to all kinds of programs at Nuevos: How to manage a checking account? Programs on drugs and crime." Not long after completing two levels of ESL, Romano was hired by a local bank. Now he takes classes in the evening at Triton where he hopes to get a degree in business administration or computer science. Romano wants to give back to the Hispanic

community so he volunteers at Nuevos Horizontes by helping people with their income tax forms.

Corrine Bolanos (pseudonym) had given up on school when she was 16. She struggled with her English and it seemed to her she would never graduate. A few years after leaving school, she visited Nuevos Horizontes and found out about a special bilingual high school completion program. She enrolled and eight months later received her high school diploma. Upon graduating, Corrine applied for and later received one of the HispanoFest college scholarships. Corrine is now in her second semester at Triton where she majors in hotel management. "Nuevos helps me all the time. Whenever I have a problem at Triton I come here and they help me."

What can we learn about Nuevos Horizontes based on the preceding data, programmatic analyses, and student narratives? What are the keys to its innovative quality and its effectiveness? I discuss five aspects of Nuevos Horizontes: an emphasis on Hispanic culture, employing bilingual staff, a commitment to holistic education, physical proximity to the Hispanic community, and community partnerships.

Emphasis on Hispanic Culture. Clearly, Nuevos Horizontes demonstrates a commitment to Hispanic culture. HispanoFest is the most obvious example. The goal at the center is to help students become more proficient in English and more knowledgeable about U.S. customs and practices, yet at the same time the program stresses the importance of celebrating one's own culture. A member of the Nuevos Horizontes advisory board commented: "One of the secrets to its success is that Hispanics in the community feel at home there. They walk in the door and the whole place reminds them of their cultural

heritage." A staff member at Triton added: "The word has gotten out to the Hispanic community that Nuevos is culturally-friendly. They know that when they go there they don't have to be ashamed of who they are. The whole attitude at Nuevos has carried over to our main campus. More and more Hispanics in the area see Triton as an option for them."

Bilingual Staff. Related to its commitment to Hispanic culture is the fact that staff at Nuevos Horizontes speak both English and Spanish. Obviously, this is an absolute necessity when serving students with limited English proficiency. Corrine Bolanos had pretty much given up on her education because of her limited English-speaking abilities. However, when she went to Nuevos Horizontes she found out, from bilingual staff, that there were other options for her to complete her degree.

Commitment to Holistic Education. Another reason for the success of the center is its commitment to the whole person--not just the academic or intellectual portion. As a staff member at the center noted: "Our theory is that education is more than the academic. We operate under the idea of community education. Community education is not only the academics, but also you need to educate yourself about all the other aspects of life and society." At Nuevos Horizontes, an emphasis on holistic education means providing information and resources about a variety of opportunities available to local residents and students: "Part of our role is to educate the student about different community services available to them. Show them the ropes." Nuevos Horizontes also recognizes the importance the family plays in the education process: "We adopt a holistic view of education that includes the family. We have a parents' education program that helps to

educate parents about schooling so that they can relate to their children and help them to succeed in school."

Physical Proximity. Physical proximity to the Hispanic community is another source of strength for Nuevos Horizontes. As one volunteer noted, "I think of Nuevos as a second home within the community. We are part of the community. We work hard to find out what the needs of the community are before we come up with programs." Another staff member pointed out how the needs of the community change and how important it is to be closely connected to the local residents. Several staff at both Nuevos Horizontes and Triton pointed out how fearful the whole idea of higher education is to some Hispanic immigrants, many of whom have never even considered a college education. One noted: "Having a college community center right in the middle of the Hispanic community says something. It makes the idea of college more of a likelihood."

Community Partnerships. Central to the success of Nuevos Horizontes is its effectiveness in gaining community support, not just in terms of local residents who utilize its services, but in terms of local businesses and agencies who support the program. A member of the local township governing body explained: "A key to Nuevos is involving everybody in the community. That's what the community education day was all about: to let people see how different collaborations and partnerships have made a difference in terms of sharing resources and accessing services." An example of the success of Nuevos Horizontes in building partnerships is the fact that many of its classes are taught not at the Center, where the facilities are limited, but are scheduled throughout the surrounding

communities in churches and in schools. HispanoFest is perhaps the largest project coordinated by the center that depends on community collaboration.

Discussion

The analysis of Nuevos Horizontes provides some insights into the larger issue of how one might think about multicultural organizational change. To be more clear, multiculturalism is more than merely offering courses on diverse peoples and cultures. Multiculturalism involves restructuring educational institutions so that all people have the opportunity to play a significant role in the life of the organization. Creating multicultural institutions involves rethinking the goals of education so that issues of citizenship, social responsibility, and democratic participation become central (Bensimon & Tierney, 1992/1993).

In his recent work entitled Building Communities of Difference, Tierney (1993) talks about communities organized around difference instead of commonality: "It is curious perhaps that I am suggesting that we build the idea of community around the concept of diversity, for communities generally suggest commonality. Such communities, however, have inevitably silenced those of us on the borders" (p. 25). Tierney goes on to suggest that academic communities need to "develop the notion of difference and engage in dialogues across border zones" (p. 25). Border zones refer to cultural differences such as race, class, gender, and sexual orientation; differences that serve to separate "us" from "them" (Anzaldua, 1987). By stressing dialogues across difference, he is not suggesting that differences be silenced or "whitewashed." Instead, what is called for is a respect for

cultural difference. Yet, we cannot allow differences to interfere with important dialogues over common social concerns such as justice and equality for all.

People are not only shaped by culture, but they also continually reshape culture through their lives and their social interactions (Geertz, 1973). Certainly, immigrants to a new land ought to become acquainted with the customs, practices, and even the language of their new surroundings. But, because culture is continually reshaped, the new culture immigrants are confronted with must also adjust to them: as newcomers are socialized to the ways of the new culture, the culture is also reshaped by them. This means that educational institutions in general and community colleges in particular must not only help immigrants to learn about .he U.S., these same organizations must change as well.

The goal of Nuevos Horizontes is not merely to inculcate U.S. values, beliefs, and traditions, as well as the English language. The program also seeks to preserve that which is unique to the individual: the student's cultural background and heritage. The message conveyed at Nuevos Horizontes is founded on a two-way view of community education: not only do Hispanic immigrants learn about the U.S. and the local community, but immigrants can teach others about their ways. A two-way view of the educational process is essential to creating multicultural community colleges. Not only must community colleges be concerned with how to educate diverse students, but they must also work hard to learn from these students in order to fundamentally change the way the organization operates.

Although Nuevos Horizontes has done a great job of creating an educational environment where Hispanic immigrants feel at home and might begin their postsecondary

careers on a positive note, the impact that the program has had on the entire campus of Triton College remains unclear. By creating a specific program to deal with immigrant students and issues relating to cultural difference, Triton runs the risk of compartmentalizing mulitculturalism and limiting the impact cultural diversity might have on the entire community. The challenge that lies ahead for Triton College is to expand the awareness and commitment evidenced by staff at Nuevos Horizontes to the main campus.

Conclusion

The idea of multiculturalism generates consternation and confusion among many who work in community college settings. For some, multiculturalism is seen as a threat to prevailing views of academe. To others, discussions of multiculturalism are so vague that the concept is difficult to comprehend. My goal in this article is to put forth a specific view of multiculturalism that is not meant to thwart current academic understandings, but instead is intended to expand those understandings. I offer Nuevos Horizontes as an example of a multicultural program that has effectively met the needs of Hispanic immigrant students, yet I raise questions about the compartmentalization of cultural difference. Clearly, we must develop specific policies, practices, and programs that support the educational efforts of diverse peoples. At the same time, we must recognize the dangers in compartmentalizing multicultural efforts. The challenge we face is to create multicultural programs that have both broad and specific organizational effects. Nuevos Horizontes has clearly contributed in specific ways to multicultural change at Triton College. However, the broader impact of the program remains to be seen.

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